



City of Grand Rapids

Study shows disparities in traffic stops

GRPD to review and implement recommendations

04/18/17: GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. – Results of a Traffic Stop Data Analysis shows that Black motorists are twice as likely to be stopped by police within the City of Grand Rapids than non-Black drivers. Hispanic drivers also experienced disparities while driving in some areas of the community. White and women drivers, however, did not face disparate treatment.

Those results, as well as other data examining possible disparities and detailing recommendations, are part of a 100-page report submitted to the City by Lamberth Consulting. Grand Rapids officials requested the study last year as part of its 12-Point Plan to Strengthen Community and Police Relations, released in early 2015.

“Findings from the Traffic Stop Study are very troubling,” City Manager Greg Sundstrom said. “The Study gives us a three-year review of the operational practices of the Grand Rapids Police Department, prior to the enactment of the 12-Point Plan, showing disparities in Grand Rapids Police Department traffic stops. The City does not shy away from these disappointing findings. We own this.”

The report, available below, conducts analysis by comparing observational benchmarks to the Grand Rapids Police Department (GRPD) traffic stop data. The study examined 20 intersections throughout the City during 2013, 2014 and 2015. The consultant also compared current data with that collected during a similar study conducted in 2004. The race/ethnicity of drivers at those same locations was determined by surveying on randomly selected days and times. Lamberth Consulting compared the proportion of minority stops to minority traffic. In addition, the proportion of minority motorists searched was compared to the proportion of minority motorists stopped.

According to the report, Black motorists were searched far more than their presence in traffic among motorists stopped. Black motorists were also no more likely to be carrying contraband when searched than were non-Black motorists. Hispanic motorists were searched about the same rate they were stopped, and contraband was found at a somewhat lower rate than among White and Black motorists.

Sundstrom said while the community and its police department have formed a solid partnership and have enacted several policies that were adopted after the years studied in the report, the study showed that traffic stops were applied disparately during the study years.



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“This is unexceptionable, and it must end,” Sundstrom said. “This is contrary to the values of our community. The City holds racial equity as our highest priority, and we will place great urgency on this mandate to address the inequities and disparities in our traffic stops and policing practices. In addition to adopting many of the recommendations made in the report, we will also begin a critical review of the Police Department’s policing practices to eliminate racial bias.”

Lamberth offers 12 recommendations for eliminating disparities in the report. They are:

1. Analyze GRPD’s stop and search data for 2016 traffic stops
2. Publicize stop and search data over the next four years
3. Begin a comprehensive review of policies and procedures
4. Review data collection efforts to ensure recording of relevant data
5. Evaluate training to ensure staff is trained in bias-free policing
6. Assess staff reward and recognition and promotion programs
7. Evaluate Field Training Officers to ensure correct training practices
8. Evaluate Field Training Officers to ensure they are aware of the need to protect against bias based policing
9. Assess and evaluate the GRPD’s early warning system to determine which officers may be stopping and/or searching minority motorists at a higher rate than their peers
10. Continue to bring officers and the community together to discuss the report and community and police relations
11. GRPD should begin to survey the community on a regular basis to obtain citizen feedback
12. Within six months, report to the community on action taken as a result of the Traffic Stop Study

Grand Rapids Chief of Police David Rahinsky said he was very troubled by the results and that he saw this study as an important departmental assessment and a courageous next step to further improve his department and its bond with the community.

“The national watershed moments in 2014 created an opportunity for introspection all across the country,” Chief Rahinsky said. “Here in Grand Rapids, that introspection was a call to action and a partnership with the community. The 12-Point Plan that was developed as a response was significant. Together, we have implemented police body cams, overhauled our hiring practices and undergone bias-free policing and implicit bias trainings -- but we are not done. This report and adoption of its recommendations will allow the community and the Police Department to continue our journey in developing the finest, most responsive department in the country.”

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